The belief of the Magyars in man's survival beyond the grave 775 .763

originates in pre-Christian times; it is deep-rooted and generally accepted. Death, therefore, is not necessarily a cause for sorrow. In his last minutes, the dying person, stretched out on the floor of the main living room, calmly takes leave from his family and friends who, in turn, entrust him with messages to be delivered to those he is about to join. The preparation of the corpse is the duty of 764 [462] women, who outfit the dead in his wedding attire or best outfit (in some regions, Narta e.g., in white). In the coffin (mostly black but also blue, red, or green) they place food, tobacco, favorite tools, or toys, if the dead person was a child. The grave itself always faces east. The burial ceremony is followed by the tor which is today a simple banquet, but which used to be until quite recently an occasion of joyful celebration. This feast, as with all of the Ob- [769] Ugric peoples, actually served the purpose of entertaining and propitiating the spirit of death.

Customs connected with marriage show surprising parallelisms 766 with burial customs. Deceased spinsters are often buried in a wedding outfit and, in some regions, a young man who died before having a chance to get married will be given a symbolic bride who, clad in wedding attire, accompanies him to the grave and is supposed to mourn him as

Article "A," Subparagraph 1k, Sociological Background

RELIGION

The population of Hungary is predominantly (65 per cent) Catholic. 162. 795
Calvinists are second in importance (20 per cent), while Lutherans and Jews represent five per cent each, and the number of Unitarians and Greek Catholics is very small. None of these denominations is linked today with specific ethnic groups (there is, however, a preponderance of Calvinism in the Kúnság); their geographical distribution is relatively even, with the percentage of Protestants rising slightly toward the east. Regardless of church adherence, 771 756
the present-day Christian religious life of the Magyar peasants still shows the relics of their ancient faith.

The primitive religion of the Magyars was shamanism associated with a kind of animal-totemism. Sorcery played an important part in their spiritual life and soothsayers held key positions in the retinues of the tribal chiefs. We have little material evidence of this primitive religion; no drums or other accessories of shamanistic rites used by the Magyars' ancestors have ever been found. However, the essentials of their funeral rites, as revealed [764]
by excavations, accord exactly with the shamanistic ceremonies of Inner-Asiatic tribes.

The last hour having struck, the window is opened before the departing soul as before a captive bird, because its way must not be barred. Otherwise it might not find peace and might return to disturb the living . . . 763 775

The dead person's bed is made up for the last time at home. He is then clothed in his death clothes which for a lifetime have been kept for him with the utmost care. Brides keep their wedding dresses, so that fifty or sixty years later they may be their death wear. In some parts the women begin to embroider their death sheet at the age of fourty, as they want to enter a better world wrapped in their own handiwork. Girls are laid on their death beds in white dresses with a bride's wreath on their heads: their bridegroom is waiting for them in another world . . . And a lad, who dies in his prime, is supposed to be the bridegroom of Heaven . . . The coffin, that eternal bed, was not always black. Only the old people's coffins used to be painted black, those of the young were pale or dark blue, green or white . . . 764*

People used to be supplied with several things for this great journey. The old Hungarians were buried with their horses, bows, quivers, later on the head at least of their favourite horse was put by their side. With a woman were buried her sickle and her combs; with a child his toys, and if he died without being baptized, they put his little shirt and his swaddle by his side; sometimes needles and thread were also added.

Occasionally the dead person's favourite possessions were also put into the coffin as provision for his journey; they were meant to cheer and quieten him. In some instances even that which he last desired: food, a bottle of wine and a pipe are also put by his side. Godly people take with them their bible, their psalm book and their rosary twisted round their fingers. In some Hungarian villages

10: Viski E-4, 5 (no date) 1932 EC1 Hungary EC1

764 the dieing man lies in the courtyard, and his favourite horse is led up to him to bid him a sad fare well... In other parts the dead man's most precious animals, his horses and his oxen, accompany him on his last journey...

[774] While the dead person is in the house, it is neither swept, nor is a fire laid, for fear that his soul might return. The mirror is covered, because a thousand evils might follow from the dead mans reflection in it...

Old men carve in advance their coffin, the gravestone or cross for themselves and also for their wives. Their neighbours dig their eternal resting place for them. In some parts the dead farmer's best friends carve his cross from the finest tree of his yard, decorating it with all kinds of ornaments and inscriptions in verse.

When the sad news has spread round, people come in streams to see the dead man; they praise his fine character, his kind heart, or at least the courage with which he endured his suffering. A black flag flies on the front of the house, or the coffin-lid hangs on its wall facing the street; in the evening candles burn in its window as a sign of death being present. Pain and consternation keep a vigil while darkness covers the abode of mourning. Relations, neighbours and friends also come to take a share in the vigil; pain gets less acute, the mood lighter and as night gets darker, every now and then even a joke is cracked. At midnight everything is silenced and the night, like a black cloth, enwraps the mournful house.

Next morning the wailing for the dead starts all over again. The ancient melody, its rhythm and words regulated merely by dutiful manners and the fluctuations of suffering, resounds without rhyme or cadence: «What were you to me, what were you for me... you were my everything, my providence, by beloved dear husband... Off you went, leaving me here, alone... Who is going to

764 earn the daily bread for your poor orphans, who is going to provide them with their clothes... Who is going to console your desperate widow... Who is going to say to me in the morning: woman, do you hear the swineherd sounding his horn? The pigs are already at the gate, drive out the sow! Alas, alas, my poor dear husband, if only I could hear your severe words just once more, just once more...»

The dead person must be properly mourned. A person who has no mourners, is an orphan indeed:

The dead man has been laid in the courtyard,
But there is no one to mourn over him;
Now it is evident who is a real orphan,
It is the one over whose coffin no one sheds tears.

767 If some people cannot mourn properly themselves, they hire professional mourners to wail for them. At least that was the custom in the very near past. The female mourners have a very rich collection of songs, as they had to fulfill their vocation as daily paid workers. Their melodies are not improvised, they are usually taken over from popularized church hymns. The following verse is from the song of a professional mourner of the Great Plain:

My eyes shall cry
My tears shall fall.
Wash my tear-stained face!
This dead man
Needs no heavenly due,
My sad tears shall
Gleam like pearls all over him...

The mourning women have special laments for mothers, wives, children, relations. This is what they sing for a wife:

767

The bird has flown away,
The cage is empty,
Her dear mate cooes in vain
Cooes in vain.
She won't return
Because the dark grave
Has already embraced her.

This is for a child:

The news has already started
To spread all over the town,
People are collecting
Dear child, to visit you with a frown.
Death, death, death,
Why were you so cruel,
Weren't you sorry to pluck
Such a lovely flower?
No, you were not sorry,
You made it wither
As you tore it from
His loving parents' arms.

764 And then dawns the last day... Two poles are used or the hearse is pulled out and the dead is carried to find eternal rest in his everlasting abode: his coffin... Great care is taken to avoid all occurrences which might disturb the soul of the dead, or prompt it to return. The procession starts out, their songs resound, the good neighbours walk in a row with hoes in their hands, as they have to shuffle the earth on the everlasting abode... Not so long ago the men were buried in many places with beflagged pikes, and these were placed in the ornamental pike holders on the grave. The old men were given black pikes, the young men white ones... The German poet Count Alexander of Württemberg (1801—1844) refers in two of his poems to the beflagged pike grave yards which he saw in the outskirts of Keszthely. The sight «reminds me of the masts of a dead fleet, it attracts every tired soul let down

your anchor here and rest». (Der Friedhof. Sämtl. Gedichte von Alex. Graf von Württemberg. Leipzig. Reclam-Ausgabe.) To this day grave decorations of this kind can be found in great numbers in the Calvinist cemetaries of the Great Plain and Transylvania, they are most beautiful samples of the Hungarian art of wood carving. While the pike holder is being set up, or even previously, and while the earth drops into the grave, the favourite songs of the deceased are played, even gay tunes, lively csárdás songs . . .

When they come back from the graveyard, the funeral feast begins. At first all the poor who have assembled for the occasion are given food. During the funeral feast there is even more gaiety than at the vigil, and in some parts it gradually changes into a joyous feast, as though the funeral had been exchanged for a wedding . . . Because of this strange kind of last wedding feast in many parts even the very old women are buried in their wedding dress, and old men in the clothes which they were given by their fiancées many years previously. This last wedding is especially the due share of an unmarried lad or girl. They are the bridegrooms or brides of Heaven . . . so they have a right to a wedding celebration. At this kind of wedding feast people dance, sing and enjoy themselves as though it were the real wedding of the person in question.

In olden days this custom of feasting the wedding of a dead youth or girl was habitual amongst the rich as well as amongst the poor. Coloman Mikes, nobleman of Transylvania (he died in 1686) also feasted the wedding of his only daughter who had died unmarried in the prime of her life. At the funeral feast he declared that if his daughter had not died, they certainly would have celebrated her wedding. As he had married his daughter to Our Saviour Christ, Mikes expected: «All who love me to be gay at my house to-day!» And gay they were,

765 822 few villages the mourning women tie a white linen band onto their forehead. Many a folk song, which is still sung to this day, preserves old popular customs:

While I live, I'll dress in black,
When I'm dead, I'll walk in white...

Or another one:

Mother dear!
Find my white dress,
I'm starting on a journey
From which I shan't return.

Even older memories are referred to in this folk song:

I'd rather mourn for her in three colours of mourning:
On Friday in red,
On Saturday in white,
On Sunday in dead black...

765 There are places where the funeral feast is repeated at certain regular intervals. At this feast they lay a place for the deceased, crossing his knife with his fork, and putting his turned up plate on top of them, while his chair is left empty. According to a local custom when the wailing Hungarian mourners of Moldavia are offered brandy and bread, they always lift their glass and wish that the dead could also share in their drink.

775 According to the Funeral Speech (a historic relic from the 12th century we are dust and ashes... But according to the still live faith of our ancient religion: non omnis moriar... We shall rise again. And our people believe faithfully that we do not even die, our soul merely flies to a new world, to start a new life.

• 764 The crosses in the graveyard are decorated with resounding inscriptions invented either by the master carver himself, or if he has no poetic vein, then another village professional, the verse composer writes them. These inscrip-

764 tions are to console those left behind, and to impress all thoughtful people. But a huge mass of these kind of verses and doggerels, products of Hungarian humour and fatalism, have never yet been carved on a grave. This harvest is a peculiar growth of Hungarian popular poetry. One thus consoles :

Good old Czomba hated to eat tomatoes
Yet his soul shall enter straight into the Heavenly Garden.
You say he shall rise again : but he will not,
As far as he is concerned, the archangel blows in vain.

Besides the New Golden ABC of the calvinist students of Sárospatak has long announced that :

He who has once gone down a grave
Is unlikely to see daylight again.

Sometimes the staggeringly quick appearance of death bids people to think :

She stood in the doorway mixing a pudding
When death took her away at one single lugging.

Many a person has found his death in quarreling, to which Hungarians have always had an inclination. But fate has so placed us that someone has always been trailing his coat in front of us. Hungarians have fought just enough during a thousand years, and mostly not for their own sake. — Other people got into deadly trouble by accident, without wanting it. Fate pushing them into some tragic occurence, as in the case of Ferke Bodó :

My name is Ferke Bodó,
I was hit over the head by mistake,
Those who attacked me
Were lying in wait for Stephen Zöld
It was me they knocked down by mistake
That is why I died out of favour !

10: Viski E-4, 5 (no date) 1932 EC1 Hungary EC1

And how many accidents can befall a person: 764 ●

Here rests Aron Tóth,
He has been to many a market,
Horses he bought and sold,

Until he was kicked one day
By a gelding horse on his thigh
This is the receipt of his last deal.